...TRATEGIC HAZARD INTERVENTION ESPIONAGE LOGISTICS DIREC...

May [redacted]

To: Anthony Stark, Director of S.H.I.E.L.D.
From: [redacted]
Re: The Defenders

Director Stark,

In regards to my letter on April 9th, although I'm certainly glad to see you took my advice concerning the Defenders Initiative entry, it's apparent Kyle Richmond (Codename: Nighthawk) and Jennifer Walters (codename: She-Hulk) have little regard for the Initiative, particularly for the order of command and for the [redacted]. After the team was officially disbanded, Richmond returned to [redacted] headquarters and intercepted a S.H.I.E.L.D. distress call from [redacted]. Intel reports he and Walters chased the call to West Virginia where they -- without proper clearance, mind you - infiltrated a Sons of the Serpent cell to rescue Agent Joaquin Pennysworth, believed to be killed during the [redacted] mission. Pennysworth appears to be alive, and while I must concede their intentions are noble, their actions could (and I believe, will) cause more harm than good. She's reckless and he's desperate, sir. And our intel reports the Sons of the Serpent have obtained the Madbomb from [redacted] a device capable of driving the American public mad - and which our spies in the S.O.S. tell us has already affected Richmond and Walters. Just what we need - desperate, reckless and insane.

Also, in regards to your request, we've found more activity regarding Daimon Hellstrom (Codename: Son of Satan). Our files find a sudden record of a meeting between him and the mystically inclined alien techno wizard, Yandroth about [redacted] years ago. Still no word on Atlantean warlord Krang, except to say that [redacted].

The Defenders are done. Or at least they ought to be after Richmond's insubordination. And if this news of them being affected by the Madbomb is true, well, then we've got two reckless, desperate and insane people on our hands. I know the team always had a rough history, but I strongly urge this recent incarnation be enough to say this was the Last Defenders.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Cover by Leinil Yu and Justin Ponsor

Madame Masque - Friday, 9 PM

Production by Irene Lee

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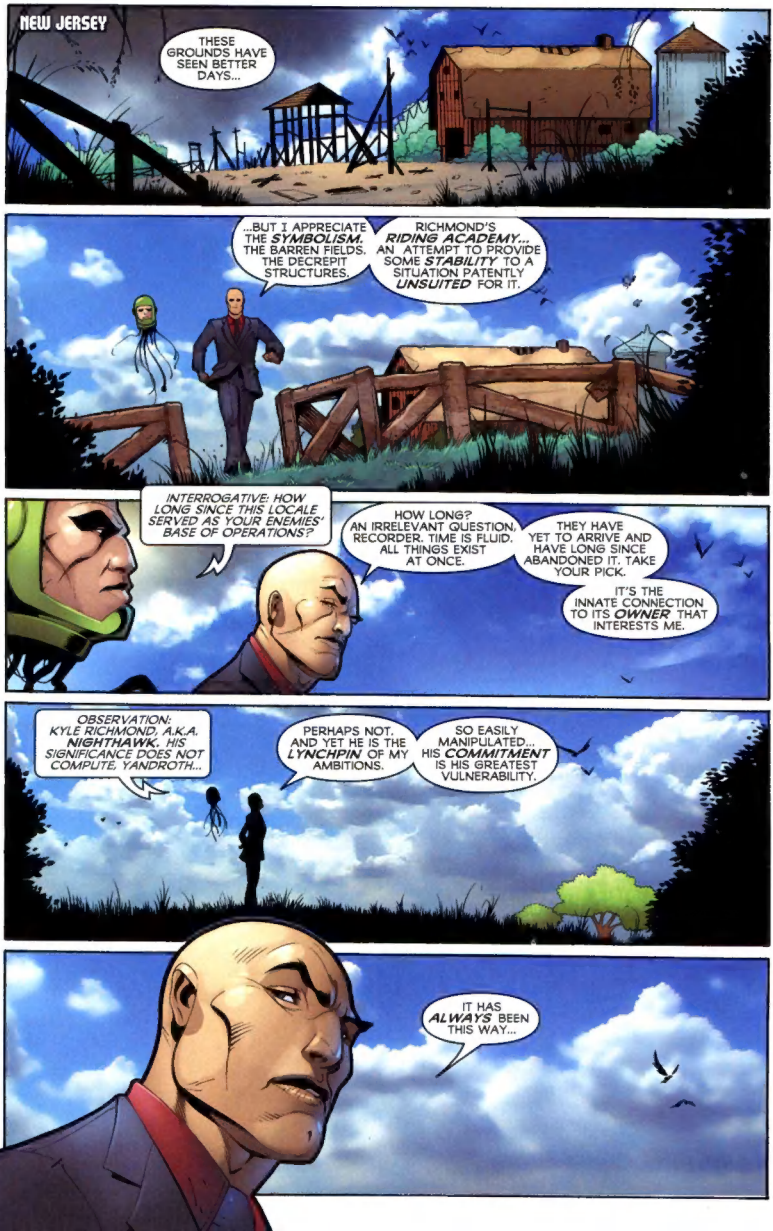
WEBSTER COUNTY, VA.
THE SONS OF THE SERPENT'S SECRET BASE
NIGHTHAWK
(RICHMOND, KYLE)
INITIATIVE STATUS: REGISTERED
NEW JERSEY FIELD TEAM (DECOMMISSIONED)
THIS COULD BE GOING BETTER...
SHE-HULK
(WALTERS, JENNIFER)
INITIATIVE STATUS: REGISTERED
NEW JERSEY FIELD TEAM (DECOMMISSIONED)
S.H.I.E.L.D. AGENT
(PENNYSWORTH, JOAQUIN C.)
STATUS: MISSING IN ACTION
SPECIAL AGENT · FIELD OPERATIONS
THE MOVEMENT YOU NEED
A CASEY·MUNIZ·SMITH·COMICRAFT·FABELA
BRENNAN·WACKER·QUESADA·BUCKLEY PRODUCTION

GREENWICH VILLAGE
DOCTOR STRANGE
COMING BACK HERE WAS A *MISTAKE*. I'M STILL NOT READY --
-- BUT A *STAMPEDE* FROM OUT OF THE DREAM REALM AND ONTO *MY* HOME TURF?! YOUR *MASTER* WOULD BE PROUD...!
AND RIGHT NOW I'M IN NO SHAPE TO --
AHEM.
MY THANKS, OLD FRIEND. WITH MY *HANDS* IN THIS STATE...MY MYSTICAL ENERGIES AT AN ALL-TIME *LOW*... WELL, NIGHTMARE'S HERD IS NOT SO EASILY BANISHED FROM OUR REALITY.
THEN AGAIN, THERE AREN'T MANY WHO CAN WITHSTAND SUCH A PURE BLAST OF *HELLFIRE*...

PALADIN.
TYPICAL NIGHT ON THE TOWN...?
JUST THWARTING A LITTLE DIPLOMATIC ESPIONAGE.
THE CARNELIAN AMBASSADOR HIRED ME TO INTERCEPT THIS GENIUS BEFORE MORE CLASSIFIED DOCS WERE PILFERED FROM HIS OFFICE.
SO WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
HEAR ME OUT. I'M GIVING YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE. FULLY BANKROLLED...
...I CAN EVEN MEET YOUR QUOTE.
DANNY VINCENT.
OR DO YOU PREFER JUNTA...?
I KNOW YOU'RE ON SOMEBODY'S SHORT LIST FOR THE INITIATIVE. A FORMER SPY WITH GRAVITY POWERS. I GET IT. EVER CONSIDERED REGISTERING?
¿MÁS VISTIERON A HÉROES? ESTE TIENE UN CABO...
I GOT IT, MA.
HERE'S THE THING ABOUT THE HERO GAME...THERE'S NO MONEY IN IT.
THERE IS NOW.
YEAH? THEN I'M ALL EARS.
ERIK JOSTEN.
SCIENTISTS AT HAMMOND BROUGHT YOU OUT OF YOUR COMA. BUT THEY WOULDN'T PLACE YOU ON A TEAM...
I COULDN'T PASS THE PHYSICAL. THEY SAID MY SIZE CHANGING WAS STILL TOO UNRELIABLE. YOU'RE ASKING HOW I ENDED UP HERE?
I AM. I WORKED WITH YOU IN THE OLD THUNDERBOLTS. YOU'RE A VALUABLE ASSET AND YOU'RE STUCK HERE DOING MANUAL LABOR FOR A GROUP OF BLACK MARKET SCIENTISTS...
WELL, I STILL NEED TO EAT. THESE GUYS PAY A STIPEND...
SO WILL I.
...
SERIOUSLY?


NEW JERSEY
THESE GROUNDS HAVE SEEN BETTER DAYS...
...BUT I APPRECIATE THE SYMBOLISM. THE BARREN FIELDS. THE DECREPIT STRUCTURES.
RICHMOND'S RIDING ACADEMY... AN ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE SOME STABILITY TO A SITUATION PATENTLY UNSUITED FOR IT.
INTERROGATIVE: HOW LONG SINCE THIS LOCALE SERVED AS YOUR ENEMIES' BASE OF OPERATIONS?
HOW LONG? AN IRRELEVANT QUESTION, RECORDER. TIME IS FLUID. ALL THINGS EXIST AT ONCE.
THEY HAVE YET TO ARRIVE AND HAVE LONG SINCE ABANDONED IT. TAKE YOUR PICK.
IT'S THE INNATE CONNECTION TO ITS OWNER THAT INTERESTS ME.
OBSERVATION: KYLE RICHMOND, A.K.A. NIGHTHAWK. HIS SIGNIFICANCE DOES NOT COMPUTE, YANDROTH...
PERHAPS NOT. AND YET HE IS THE LYNCHPIN OF MY AMBITIONS.
SO EASILY MANIPULATED... HIS COMMITMENT IS HIS GREATEST VULNERABILITY.
IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY...

YOU WILL REFER TO ME AS U-MAN, ALVARADO. DO NOT FORGET WHAT I GAIN FROM THIS DEVIL'S PACT...
MY APOLOGIES, AND, REST ASSURED, I'M WELL AWARE OF WHAT THE BOARD HAS PROMISED YOU.
I AM A SCIENTIST AS WELL AS A WARRIOR. YOUR OBFUSCATION OF BRAND'S GOALS CANNOT --
AUTO-ALERT ALPHA: SECURITY NET ACTIVE -- PERIMETER BREACH! PERIMETER BREACH!
WHAT--?!
CHECK THE ONBOARDS! THESE SYSTEMS HAVEN'T BEEN ONLINE FOR TOO LONG...!
PROXIMITY ALERT: UNAUTHORIZED SIGNAL CLOSING --
YOU FAILED TO COVER YOUR TRACKS, ALVARADO!
WHO DARES--?!
LEADING HIRED GUNS INTO BATTLE -- TALK ABOUT A GAMBLE...
...I JUST HOPE IT PAYS OFF...!
IF IT DOESN'T... THERE'LL BE HELL TO PAY!